

'Now I can say, I am a Tulane alumna'

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When it comes to graduation presents, it's hard to beat this one. To celebrate her Tulane bachelor's degree, prospective graduate Jeanny Keck is returning to Beirut, Lebanon, where she grew up. She hasn't been there in 30 years.



"Knowledge is so important," says Jeanny Keck, who has been a full-time Tulane staff member since 2002 and will receive her undergraduate degree at the May 18 Unified Commencement Ceremony. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

Far from a typical graduate, Keck is 67 years old, was raised by French Catholic Carmelite nuns in Beirut and came to the U.S. at the age of 17 to visit. She stayed, living with a host family in California. She earned an associate degree there, but her lifelong goal was to finish her education.

"I always encouraged my kids to pursue a good education," she recalls. Her two sons and one daughter graduated from Princeton, Harvard and Cornell universities. They will be in New Orleans to see her graduate. "Now I can say, and I went to Tulane!"

The path to that degree took a turn toward home when she came to work full-time at

Tulane in 2002 as a secretary in the [Department of French and Italian](#). Taking classes in her spare time, she was unsure about her major. A native French speaker (she's also fluent in Arabic), eventually she chose a French major.

There were difficult moments. “Symbolic Logic class nearly killed me. I was at the tutoring center every night,” she says. “And the Physical Geology labs were brutal.”

Now it's almost time to celebrate. At 6 a.m. on May 18, she will be at the Mercedes-Benz Superdome to visit with her Tulane friends who are commencement volunteers. Keck has worked with them as an usher at the past 11 ceremonies.

“I really consider Tulane like my family. And I mean that,” says Keck, now the executive secretary in French and Italian.

Her education isn't over? she's too used to getting up at 4 a.m. to study flash cards for her classes. “My next goal is to learn Spanish. Then I'll know four languages.”